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ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY


JAMES A. BEAVER,

OF

PENNSYLVANIA,

*At the Banquet of the Ohio Republican League,
Columbus, Ohio, Feb. 13, 1888,*

In Commemoration of the Birthday of Abraham Lincoln.



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JAMES A. BEAVER

ADDRESS

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JAMES A. BEAVER,
OF PENNSYLVANIA,

AT THE BANQUET OF THE OHIO REPUBLICAN
LEAGUE, COLUMBUS, OHIO, FEBRUARY
13, 1888, IN COMMEMORATION
OF THE BIRTHDAY OF
ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

It is interesting to note the increased and increasing public observance of the birthday of Lincoln. The popular commemoration of this event is as significant as it is noteworthy. Significant alike of the place which the man occupies in the hearts of the people and of the position to which he is to be assigned in history.

The present observance is one of peculiar propriety. There are gathered about this table the representatives of the Republican party in Ohio. They represent pure and free Republican thought, and in a large measure, untrammelled Republican action. Ohio is one of the best exponents of true and tried Republicanism. She early gave her allegiance to the new faith; her sons were early found among its leading representatives, and from the days of

the courtly Chase and bluff Ben Wade down to the present, she has never lacked for courage and ability in the councils of the party, nor for strength and wisdom in the conduct of its affairs.

Who was the first apostle of the new faith, where was it first taught, and who were its earliest disciples? These are questions long mooted and never yet satisfactorily answered and never to be definitely settled in the minds of *all* its votaries. It may be fairly doubted, however, whether any one man on any one occasion, by a single utterance, ever more clearly defined or earlier enunciated the faith which was to be the underlying thought of the Republican party, than did Abraham Lincoln, when, in October, 1854, at Springfield, Illinois, he met in impromptu debate the famous author of the infamous repeal of the Missouri Compromise, known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and when Judge Douglas, fresh from his senatorial environment, endeavored to justify before his indignant constituency, the part which he had taken in those initial steps which, although designed to extend the area of slave territory and give increased value to slave property, led finally to the abolition of the one and the extinction of the other. Not one word, so far as is now known, of that wonderful speech of Lincoln's has been preserved. Its immediate effects, however, were the utter discomfiture of his opponent; the instant elevation of Lincoln to the leadership of popular thought in Illinois; and the clear definition of the political issue upon which the greatest questions of the century were to be fought out, and the great results, which we have seen in our day, affecting alike the nation and the world, were to be finally achieved.

Ohio undoubtedly had early disciples of the new faith. Giving her full credit for their earnest advocacy of its tenets and their faithful allegiance to its principles, is it not well for her sons thus to honor the memory if its early, I shall not say, earliest apostle? You have asked me to speak of Abraham Lincoln. Do you know what

you have asked? Do you expect me in the narrow limits of an after-dinner speech to touch even at its outermost verge a theme so great? Of what part of his career, of what phase of his great character, of what events in his history, of what elements in his mental make up, of what out-goings of his great, warm, loving heart? Abraham Lincoln! How the heart softens; how the eyes o'erflow as we recall his name! What a troop of recollections come rushing o'er the bridge of memory spanning the gulf which separates us from the fast receding years! Shall we speak of them as they come to us? How can we? What is thought; how poor is language; how inadequate the time even to recount them as they fill our hearts and struggle for utterance! Many of you are young men. These recollections can not come to you, because you have no experiences from which they can spring. To some of us, at least, who are older, they are not merely recollections. They are abiding memories which time cannot efface and which distance can never dim.

In the year 1859, in Champaign county, Illinois, there was published a newspaper called the "Central Illinois Gazette." In April of that year Mr. Lincoln visited the county in the discharge of professional engagements. The boy-editor of the newspaper came out from the breakfast table one morning, and found in the office of the modest hotel a man whom he scarcely knew, but whose appearance, as he read a letter which he had just taken from the mail, enchained him and held him in rapt attention. The deep lines of thought and the shade of melancholy which were manifest in his countenance, were at once a curiosity and a study. As the man looked up from his letter which had evidently inspired him with sublime thought and tender feeling, his great soul beamed out of his luminous eyes and his whole countenance underwent a marvelous transformation. The young watcher had never seen such a delineation of human character;

had never felt the influence of such an inspiring change in the human countenance. "He was thrilled and spell-bound by something of the force of a personality which has so often swayed multitudes at the will of the orator." "The greatest man I ever saw or heard of!" he exclaimed, as he slipped quietly out of the hotel. He rushed to the printing office. Its proprietor, a clever doctor of the neighborhood, was there before him. "Doctor!" he shouted, "I have made up my mind for whom we are going for president." "You don't say so? Who is it?" "Abraham Lincoln of Illinois." "What, old Abe?" "Nonsense." "We might go for him for vice-president; he would never do for any more than that." Seward and Lincoln would not be a bad ticket; but old Abe! who put that into your head?" "He did." "It is no use Doctor, he is the man." "You've got to attend office to-day, I am off for Springfield the next train to get material for a campaign life editorial." The doctor yielded, the young man went, and in due time Abraham Lincoln was formally announced as the choice of that paper, at least, for the nomination by the Republican party as its candidate for president of the United States.

Who that has ever seen that marvelous change come over the face of that wonderful man, can ever forget it? and who that has never seen it, can receive any adequate conception of it from its portrayal in language? You young men will very properly ask why do you speak thus extravagantly of a mere man. I answer for the thousands who knew him whether intimately or but slightly, because we loved him. Do you ask me, why was he loved? The all-sufficient answer is, he was lovable. Do you ask me what was the controlling power of his life and character? My answer is, it was his great warm heart filled with a human love which in the intensity of its manifestation broke down the barriers of reason and drove him from the haunts of men; and his all-absorbing charity which could both forgive and forget

and which yearned to embrace within its ample folds those who had injured him personally, and those who had endeavored to subvert the constitution which he was sworn to protect and in whose defense his whole life was bound up. Do you seek the illustrations which in a degree, at least, serve to sound the depths of this great heart of his? You will find them in abundance throughout the whole of his remarkable career. See the tender chords of an all-absorbing passion broken by the untimely death of his first affianced, the agony of which drove him from her bedside with his reason unbalanced and a shadow thrown across his life which was never to be removed. See him in the midst of a great political address, when fame had come to him and his services were sought in the states all around him, and as the people absorbed and spell-bound hung upon his words, suddenly stop in the midst of his address and with the exclamation, "There's Nat," spring from the platform, make his way through the crowd and embrace Nat Grigsby, a playmate of his uncultured boyhood who had known him and played with him in the log cabin days of his father's venture in the wilderness of Indiana. See him in the height of his professional triumphs defending the son of Hannah Armstrong, the lowly widow of an humble neighbor, who was charged with murder, and so defending him as by the power of his pathetic appeal and the skillful use of a discrepancy in the evidence to send the accused, amid the cheers of the multitude, acquitted to the arms of his mother, and all because his heart went out to the acquaintances and friends of his early manhood. See the life of devotion to a woman who was bound to him by no ties of blood, and yet who had been to him all that a mother could be in affectionate restraint and devoted care. See the agony of his distress over the death of his child, and the ready audience which he gave to every tale of sorrow borne to him by the grief-stricken mother or devoted wife, even when overwhelmed by the cares of state and the woes of the nation. Or, during the

long struggle for the nation's life, see his untiring efforts to save from ignominious death the boy who from sheer exhaustion slept upon his post, or the man who, for love of his family, deserted his country's cause. Sum up these hastily sketched illustrations and the thousands of others which are known and recorded and you will agree with me, I think, that Lincoln's heart was the great force in his nature. An affectionate heart, however, does not by any means imply a weak nature, and it indicated no weakness in the character or life of Lincoln, for coupled with it and second only to its promptings, was a sublime courage which rose equal to any emergency, which never bowed before defeat, which never trailed its flag in subserviency to policy, and which never surrendered to overwhelming odds. As a man he had, more than most men, the courage of his convictions, and yet as a ruler that courage was often coupled with a canny caution which made him seem timid and halting to those who did not bear his responsibilities and who were not confronted by his oath bound duties and constitutionally-defined obligations. Do you seek an illustration? Take his carefully prepared address before the Republican convention of Illinois in the year 1858, at which he was declared to be the choice of that party for United States senator as against Judge Douglas. Hear his ringing utterances: "A house divided against itself can not stand;" "I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free," and you hear the *man* who has the courage of his convictions and who adhered to those convictions in spite of the protest of friends who were interested in his success. What was success to them, was not, in a broader sense, success to him. Hear him again when the man, no less courageous, no less sublime in thought and in purpose, was limited and controlled by the obligations of the ruler, when in his famous letter to Horace Greeley, who complained of his timid policy he said, "If I could save the union without freeing any slave, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all

the slaves, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that ;” and in saying this, as he himself expressed it, he intended no modification of his “ oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free.”

If we wish to study that phase of Lincoln’s character which displays his indomitable courage, we must turn away from the consideration of his official life in which he was limited and controled and bound by constitutional and legal enactments which as both lawyer and patriot he regarded as absolutely supreme, and draw our conclusions from his conduct and his utterances when he was free to discuss in the abstract the principles and the policy which as a citizen he believed to be the best for the ultimate welfare of his country.

As a resultant force of his great heart on the one hand and his high courage on the other, we have displayed in his character a lofty patriotism which held country above self and all selfish ambitions ; which dominated every thought and purpose of his great soul, and which controlled and sustained him in the discharge of duties greater than any that ever before or since devolved upon a human being in like position. Here is a theme worthy our thought and extended consideration, but time hurries us on and we can only allude to it in this brief and imperfect way. The illustration is to be found in the daily life of his official career.

The mental make-up of Abraham Lincoln was no less remarkable than that of his emotional nature. Without any of the advantages of early education now general in every part of our country, and destitute even of the meager facilities which were afforded in our older communities to the youth of his day, by the aid of a retentive memory and a natural thirst for knowledge, he fitted himself in large part for the important place which he was to occupy in his profession, in politics, and among the world’s great men. We have all too little of what he wrote and said, and yet few as these efforts of mind and examples of his

mental caliber are, they have made his name immortal as one who wielded a ready pen and whose irresistible logic bore down all opposition. Some of them are already classed among the classics of the English language. You can find him on more than one occasion by the stroke of his pen and the interpolation of a word, changing the tone and tenor of a dispatch framed by the trained and experienced mind of his polished secretary of state. You may find him embodying in homely phrase, in letters intended for the people, the processes of thought through which he had reached conclusions for the government of his administration, by which he revolutionized popular sentiment, aroused popular feeling and restored popular confidence.

There was growth in the character of Lincoln as long as he lived. In no part of his nature was this more apparent than in the moral side of it. Always transparently honest, always pure in morals, so far as they regulate outward life, he was destined to grow. It has been alleged by some that he lacked a belief in the over-ruling providence of a personal God. Whatever may have been the views of his earlier life, no one who will follow him from the platform of the car upon which he took his departure from his neighbors and friends to assume the duties of his office, and from which in his tearful farewell, he commended them to the great God of our fathers and asked that with equal sincerity and faith they would invoke His wisdom and guidance for him, through all the devout utterances of public documents and private conversation, down to his second inaugural address, can fail to come to the conclusion that Mr. Lincoln had developed an implicit faith in God, and as the result of it a long suffering patience and a broad charity which can only spring from such a faith. His was a charity which suffereth long and is kind ; which envieth not ; which vaunteth not itself ; which is not puffed up ; which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. And we are told by authority that of all the elements

which make up the Christian character, the greatest is charity. If we would study Lincoln's character, we must follow the processes of development through which he was led to the finished man ready for the assassin's bullet. At no time in his life, at no time in his career, can you dare stop until you find him unconscious and almost pulseless upon a death bed which seemed for the time to involve both the life and the hope of the nation. As iron sharpeneth iron, so the character of Lincoln was molded by the events which he as a human instrument controlled. This is doubtless true of most men, and yet as we study Lincoln's life, we see how each successive step seemed to be the preparation for the next step upward which was before him.

In this brief delineation of the character of Abraham Lincoln, I have been necessarily controlled by the limitations of time and place which surround me. I have given conclusions rather than facts, and arguments upon which those conclusions are based. I have not spoken of the molding influences of his early life and maturer years, which fitted him for the high place to which he was called by the voice of God and the suffrages of the people. Nor have I touched upon the great events in which, as President of the United States, he was the principal actor, and in a sense the controlling power. I have not more than alluded to the wealth of incident and anecdote which abound in his life, and which have been so plentifully recorded by his biographers and the hosts of men brought in contact with him, who did not aspire to the ambitious title of biographer, and yet have given their recollections of him to the world. There was a grotesque side to his character which is well known, and to which I have not alluded, because it is not necessary to a knowledge of the well-rounded character which the man possessed, and yet if time permitted, I should be glad to speak of this peculiar phase of his mental and moral makeup, because I believe that it was the complement of another side of his character, less fully under-

stood, which furnishes an illustration of the truth of the law of physics of universal application in the natural world that action and re-action are equal and in opposite directions.

The crowning event of the political administration of President Lincoln was doubtless the promulgation of the Emancipation Proclamation, so called. The incidents attending the discussion of the propriety of issuing that proclamation are, perhaps, as striking as any that have been preserved to us concerning the intercourse of the President with his cabinet. There is no question whatever that the subject of emancipation had long been in the thought of the President. The suggestions of General Cameron in regard to the arming of the negroes, the proclamation of General Fremont, and the orders of General Hunter as to the emancipation of the blacks, as well as the legislation upon the subject, had led him to give careful consideration to it. He waited for the hour when the people were ready to receive it and when events seemed to justify it. Waited impatiently no doubt, but, and here was the strength of his character, he waited. The cabinet was summoned in special session without an intimation of the object of the meeting. Seated in their accustomed places around the the council table of the nation, Mr. Lincoln began the meeting by reading a chapter from the Orpheus C. Kerr papers, then current and quite comical. Some of the members of the cabinet looked up in astonishment; some of the dignified, perhaps, felt that they were being trifled with. All waited for what was to come next. The chapter finished, the book laid aside, the President announced to them that they had been called together not for consultation, not to give advice, but to have read to them a proclamation concerning which suggestions would be in order after it had been read. He then read to them the paper prepared by his own hand, which taken by itself would render his name immortal, and waited for their suggestions. Some opposed it, some approved. A minor suggestion or

two as to expression, and one from Secretary Seward as to the time of making the proclamation public, and the meeting adjourned. This was in mid-summer 1862, when the military situation was chaotic and the nation held its breath. The autumn came, Antietam was fought, Lee recrossed the Potomac, and the cabinet was again convened. The amended draft of the proclamation was submitted. A decision had been reached and the constitutional advisers of the President were summoned to hear it. He stated in brief terms why, in his judgment, the time for the promulgation of the proclamation had arrived; that the day of delay and hesitation had passed; that the policy of the administration upon that subject should be frankly declared, and that it would meet with a hearty popular reception and response. And, finally, said Mr. Lincoln in a low tone, I have promised my God that I will do it. A word of interrogation from Secretary Chase, as to his last remark, and Mr. Lincoln replied: "I made a solemn vow before God that if General Lee should be driven back from Pennsylvania, I would crown the result with the declaration of freedom to the slaves." The conference was ended and the immortal proclamation was issued on the twenty second of September, 1862. What a contrast between the opening of the first cabinet meeting and the declaration of the solemn vow which closed the second! And yet when carefully studied there can be little doubt that there was both philosophy and tact in the one as there was high resolve and devout feeling in the other. The chapter from the Orpheus C. Kerr papers was read, doubtless, to clear the minds both of the President and the members of his cabinet, from every thing which would interfere with the proper consideration of the great public question, the greatest with which they had to deal, which was to come before them. With minds startled by the grotesqueness of the situation, and freed from all other cares, they would be ready to grapple with the great question without any interference. This incident is used not only to illustrate what may be called the grotesque side of Mr. Lin-

coln's character, but also to emphasize those greater points to which I have alluded, his great heart, full of warm human love for his kind, his sublime courage coupled with a caution, which held him in check until the proper time for striking a blow arrived, his mental activity and profound logic, and, finally, his devout feeling which found expression in the announcement of his sublime vow to the Almighty.

Talking a day or two since with the only surviving member of Mr. Lincoln's cabinet, General Cameron, as I am always glad to do, especially when Lincoln is the topic of conversation, because of his love of and admiration for the man, he said among other things, "I have long believed that Lincoln was raised up for his place, and that God put him there." This is true of all of us in the several places which we occupy, and yet it is so startlingly true and apparent in regard to Lincoln, that we are compelled to acknowledge the hand of God in his life and career. Born under the Constitution, in obscurity, bred in poverty, reared in adversity, thwarted in love by the relentless hand of death, battling against great odds, making his opportunities, humanly speaking, and then embracing them, developing a great muscular constitution by hard and continuous toil, feeding his mental hunger under the greatest difficulties, restrained in some directions and constrained in others, apparently without purpose, we see the man finally fitted in body and mind, in heart and soul for the great place for which he was born, to which he was called and for the discharge of whose duties, his whole life had been an education.

What is to be his place in history it may be early to decide, but gatherings like that which assembled in New York on Saturday and which surrounds this board tonight are an indication that slowly but surely he is working his way in the hearts of the people, and in the general thought of mankind to the place that he must, in my judgment, eventually occupy, as first and greatest of Americans born of woman.

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